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Friends, family, and fiction

Derica Sonnon

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Friends, Family, and Fiction

A Graduate Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the Division of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Photography

By Derica Lea Sonnon

Rochester, NY

June 2002

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Friends, Family, and Fiction

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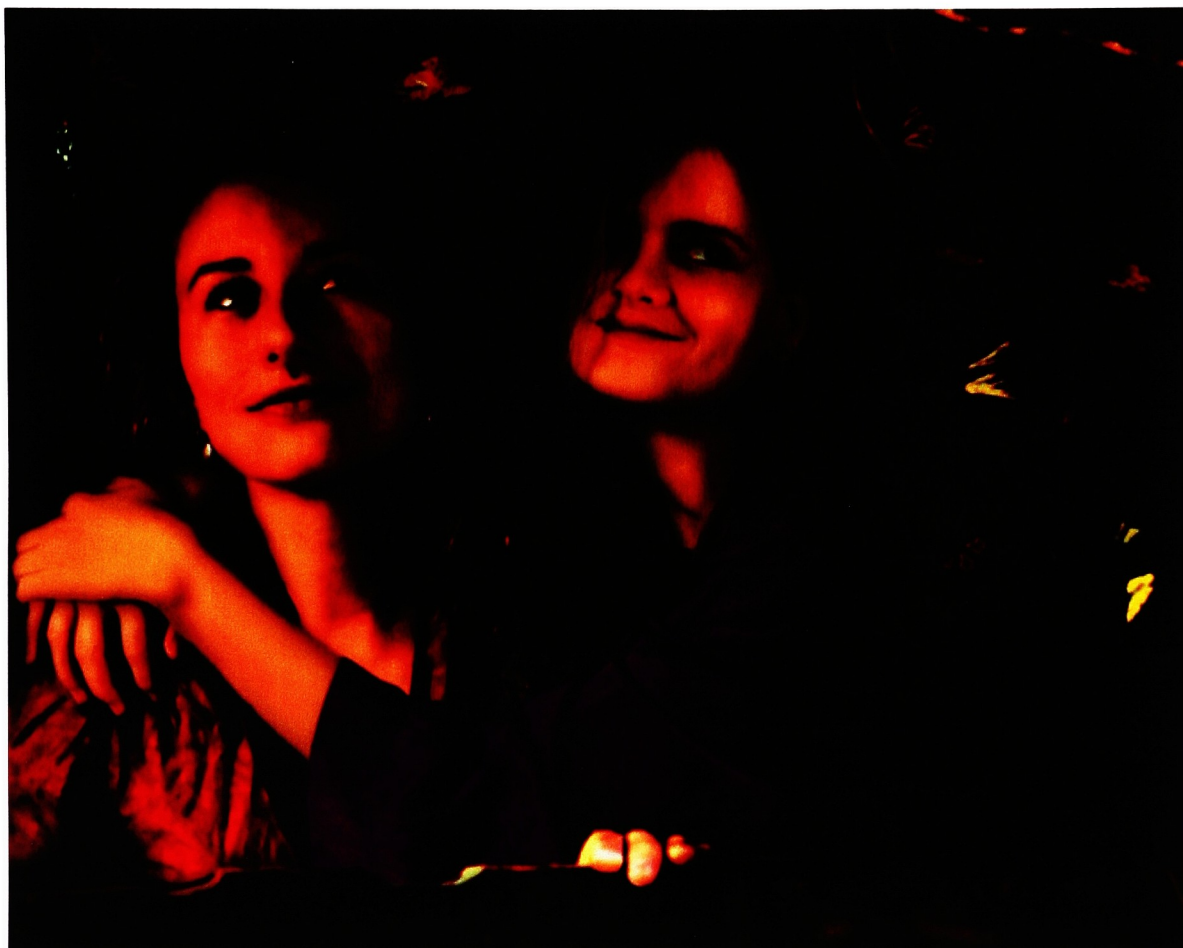
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION STATEMENT	ii
COPY SIGNATURES	iii
Chapter	
1. EVOLUTION	1
2. TECHNOLOGY	13
3. MANIFESTATION	20
Appendix	
A. ESCAPISM.....	22
B ARTIST’S STATEMENT	27
Sources Consulted.....	28

EVOLUTION



ev o lu tion

(ev''u lOO'shum)

-n.

a series of related changes in a certain direction: process of change: organic development: unfolding, movement, transformation

Webster's Third New International Dictionary¹

Man is the only one who is not locked into his environment. His imagination, his reason, his emotional subtlety and roughness, make it possible for him not to accept the environment but to change it. And that series of inventions, by which man from age to age has remade his environment, is a different kind of evolution- not biological, but cultural evolution. I call that brilliant sequence of cultural peaks *The Ascent of Man*.

Jacob Bronowski²

Art is often a reflection of the personal history of the artist. People, places, and incidents that form one's character are frequently expressed in the images one creates. My thesis show, *Friends, Family, and Fiction*, is such a collection of work.

¹Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged. (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company 1966), 789

²Bronowski, Jacob. *The Ascent of Man*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973), 19-20.

The seeds for *Friends, Family, and Fiction* were planted during my undergraduate studies at Ringling School of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida, where I majored in Graphic Design, and minored in Photography. Graphic Design utilized the computer as its main tool of production. During my



Figure 1 from *Chronicles*



Figure 2 from *Chronicles*

senior year at Ringling I became more interested in using the computer in conjunction with the camera. This was the beginning of my journey into digital imaging.

I created a series of images my first quarter at R.I.T. entitled *Chronicles*. I collaged photographs of myself and family together with scanned objects (*fig. 1*). I manipulated the collages with Photoshop by changing the color and adding “drawn” symbols. The symbols were very personal and not easily interpreted by the general public. I paired the final collage with a “key” stating the dates the images represented along with the definitions for the symbols shown in each picture. The collage was placed above the key in a white double mat. The series of four started with my childhood and progressed up to the time of the show. The collages were bright and interesting, yet I felt that the key did not add to the viewer’s understanding. The viewer was not connecting with the image.

I focused on involving my viewer directly into my next interpretation of *Chronicles*. I created a computer controlled interactive experience (*fig. 2*). When viewers entered the space enclosing the work, they saw a mouse and mouse pad on a pedestal. A series of still and animated images were projected

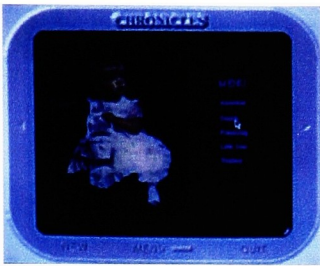


Figure 3 from *Chronicles*



Figure 4 from *Stereotypes*



Figure 5 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

onto the opposite wall along with an audio voice over. The viewers controlled which items they saw by clicking buttons on a contents screen (*fig. 3*). As before, the images were collages of family photos and scanned objects; yet they were less abstract. They resembled the composite pictures of Oscar Gustave Rejlander and H.P. Robinson. My images were less collaged than the first series yet the “piecemeal composition... endangered the consistent formal appearance of a picture.”³ The viewer could not accept the images as a whole.

My next series of photographs was entitled *Stereotypes*. This work explored the representation of myself in stereotypical feminine roles. I dressed in costumes and shot the photographs. I scanned the images and adjusted their color and saturation with Photoshop. Here I played the part of damsel in distress, secretary, housewife, and celebrity (*fig. 4*). I felt that this work did not alienate my viewer. I was, however, unhappy with how the images were immediately seen as staged or fake portrayals. The scenes looked more like a film still reminiscent of Cindy Sherman’s work. I wished for a more believable picture.

The initial strategy for *Friends, Family, and Fiction* was a combination of these previous ways of working. I started

³Scharf, Aaron. *Art and Photography*, (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 109

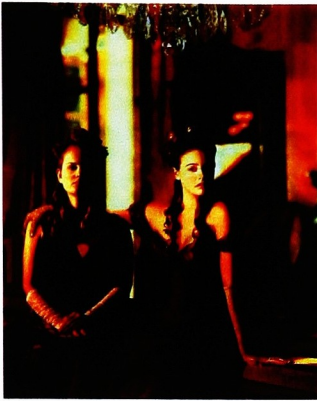


Figure 6 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

by recreating portraits of family members. The costumes and props help set the time and portray the personality. In one sepia toned photograph (*fig. 5*), I played the role of my grandmother dressed in her own wedding gown. These images looked less staged but I felt the use of my personal family members and my connection with them still kept my viewer from fully relating to the photograph. This led me toward the use of fictional relationships rather than real ones.

As I was working out the issue of better connecting my viewer with my work, a greater personal need arose. In my artwork I wasn't satisfied with my new ways of working. My physical and mental well being was at risk due to stress. My emotional / intellectual response to my environment changed the direction of my thesis from that of an inspection of my ancestral history to a fictional world filled with fanciful hopes and dreams.

While working on the first image for the series, a picture of the young actress Alicia Silverstone and myself (*fig. 6*), I immediately felt a kinship for the characters in the image. Both are dressed in period debutante clothing and sitting together in a posh environment. She has her arm draped over my shoulder in a sisterly fashion. We are close, yet have

somewhat stern looks on our faces. It may suggest to someone that we are protective of each other, or just posing for a formal family photograph. The image itself is representative of a photograph one may keep as a memento of family or event. Susan Sontag explains, “All such talismanic uses of photographs express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality.”⁴

A connection between a celebrity and myself rather than one with a member of my family would let the viewer better connect with the scene. This interpretation could be directed by visual clues but the end result was intended to be the viewer’s own story. I could play out roles as I did in *Stereotypes*, yet I would do it in a more convincing way. The further I got from portraying “reality,” the easier it was for me to create a believable image. I began to create a world in which I could get lost.

Any photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination. The ultimate wisdom of the photographic image is to say; “There is the surface. Now think-or rather feel, intuit-what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way.”⁵

⁴Sontag, Susan. On Photography, (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 16

⁵Sontag, Susan. On Photography, (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 23

This is how I created *Friends, Family, and Fiction* and this is how I see it being used by others.



Figure 7 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*



Figure 8 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

Friends, Family, and Fiction offers the respite that we all need from time to time. Herbert Gans sets the general tone in his book, *Popular Culture & High Culture*:

...the basic assumption (is) all human beings have aesthetic urges; a receptivity to symbolic expressions of their wishes and fears; a demand for both knowledge and wish-fulfillment about their society; and a desire to spend free time, if such exists, in ways that diverge from their work routine. Therefore, every society must provide art, entertainment, and information for its members.⁶

I've used a technology-based medium to present the images in a contemporary setting. The end result resembles the ads one may see on a bus stop in any large city. The pictures suggest a link to commercial art. One image (*fig. 7*) showing actress Alicia Silverstone and myself in a white room looks as if it could have come straight from a magazine selling some brand of perfume or clothing. Are these girls friends or enemies? Do we care? I create another commercialized scene where I pose with the actress and beauty product model Isabella Rossellini at a doggie birthday party (*fig. 8*). The glossiness portrayed by the image suggests the ads we see in airport terminals or at bus stops. The images reference the liberal interpretations of reality projected in mass media as well as to restate the falsehood of the "world" of *Friends, Family, and Fiction*. I have never met any of the people I pair myself

⁶Gans, Herbert J. *Popular Culture & High Culture*. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 91

with in the images of *Friends, Family, and Fiction*, yet I place myself in familiar and sometimes intimate poses and situations with them. The cult of celebrity draws me to them and I appropriate their likenesses to make them into friends and family. The commercial flavor of the artwork and the inclusion of current celebrities draw the image into a media context with reference to advertising and its connections to popular culture. I desire *Friends, Family, and Fiction* to be an ordinary view; one that will not exclude due to social status or educational level. This is accomplished by emphasizing the entertainment value inherent in much art. Once the viewers give the work an initial glance I want them to get lost in their own wonder. My goal is simple: to let off steam from my personal pressure cooker and hope that others can understand my experience.

TECHNOLOGY





Figure 9 from Forrest Gump



Figure 10 from The Crow

tech nol o gy

(tek nol' u jE)

-n.

1. the terminology of a particular subject: technical language
2. the science of the application of knowledge to practical purposes: applied science

Webster's Third New International Dictionary⁷

Technology... the knack of so arranging the world that we don't have to experience it.

Max Frisch⁸

Since the arrival of Homo Sapiens, technological

advances have been in part, pursued to improve the value of life. Whether saving time, saving energy, or saving lives, new creations continue to evolve. The latest computer technology is one of this phenomenon's newest offspring. The World Wide Web seems to be the plaything du jour. People can sit all alone in small, darkened rooms with their personal computer and feel connected to the entire world. Movies and television make use of the latest computer technology as well. Films such as Forrest Gump appropriate history by using fictional scenes shot today in combination with footage from historical archives. In the movie The Crow, the actor who played the main character

⁷Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged. (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company 1966), 2348

⁸Frisch, Max. Homo Faber. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1959), 178



Figure 11 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

tragically died before the film was completed. Digital manipulation blended the scenes to insert the absent actor into new footage and the picture was completed without him.

“Dinosaurs march through movie landscapes, and dead actors are morphed into TV commercials. These deceptions don’t bother us anymore. We know they are part of an act, and we enjoy it.”⁹ In one of my deceptions I portray myself as an FBI agent side by side with the actress Gillian Anderson (*fig. 11*) who is well known for her role as Agent Scully in the TV series, *The X-files*. Here I connect the fictional world of *Friends, Family, and Fiction* with the fictional world shown on television. With all these new capabilities available, how does one know what is real?

The fine line between the “real” and the fantastic has always been subject to manipulation. The quality of painting in the past was in part, judged by its realism. Defects in the subject were often omitted in an effort to improve on Mother Nature. Photographs were deemed as the ultimate truth while photographers used many methods to manipulate the final outcome. “But despite the presumption of veracity that gives all photographs authority, interest, seductiveness, the work that

⁹Postrel, Virginia. “Mine Eyes Deceive Me: Is the Internet Bringing the World Into Sharper Focus?” *Forbes ASAP*, 2 October 2000, 50.

¹⁰Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*, (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 6



Figure 12 *Birth of a Star*, 1995
Markio Mori



Figure 13 *Play With Me*, 1994
Mariko Mori

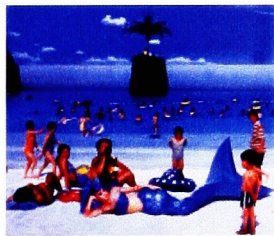


Figure 14 *Empty Dream*, 1995
Mariko Mori

¹¹Ewen, Stuart. *All Consuming Images*. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988), 200

¹²Molon, Dominic. "Countdown to Ecstasy." In *Mariko Mori*. (Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and Serpentine Gallery, London, 1998), 8

¹³Ibid.

photographers do is no generic exception to the usually shady commerce between art and truth."¹⁰

At the end of the First World War, art and culture moved in a streamlined, politically motivated direction. The traditional decorative style was replaced by the "less is more" attitude. "The idea of orderly, functional space has been a characteristic trend in twentieth-century aesthetics."¹¹ With Modernism, art focused on political unrest, simplification of form, and boldness of design. New technologies are changing this focus.

The recent shift from Modernism's stark reality toward enhanced beauty is evidenced in the works of many current artists such as Mariko Mori and Rick Dunn. Combining photography and computer technology to push the bounds of reality to new extremes, they join "a number of young artists whose use of technology, kitsch, and visual pleasure (although not necessarily at the same time) effects a sort of techno-pop rather than agitprop."¹² I use similar devices in my own work. My images are not political; they are meant to entertain by transporting the viewer into a world that is more beautiful than our own. In this style, aesthetics regains importance as the beauty of the object is refined, as opposed to the "politically



Figure 15 *Nose Job*, 1997
Rick Dunn

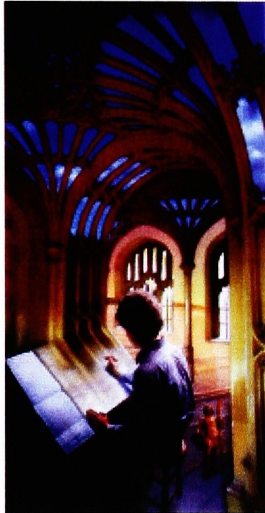


Figure 16 *The Architect*,
1997 Rick Dunn



Figure 17 from *Friends,
Family, and Fiction*

¹⁴Molon, Dominic.
“Countdown to Ecstasy.” In
Mariko Mori. (Museum of
Contemporary Art, Chicago
and Serpentine Gallery,
London, 1998), 1

¹⁵Greco, Nick and Kathleen
Ziegler, ed. *Digital Focus:
the New Media of
Photography*. Southampton,
PA: Dimensional
Illustrators, 1997), 104

motivated ‘anti-aesthetic’ work of the late 1980s and early 1990s.”¹³ Many technological advances have enhanced the ability to manipulate our vision of reality. Each has been a catalyst for evolving aesthetics.

Mariko Mori combines public imagery such as fashion, popular culture, and science fiction with themes of religion and self-awareness to create a super-reality of serene beauty and grace in a technological landscape. Fictitious video game vixens (*fig. 13*) are posed outside of arcades and plastic mermaids (*fig. 14*) frolic in the faux beach parks of Japan. The non-human cyber-beauties reflect their virtual reality environments.

Mori’s highly stylized and reservedly hopeful view of the future presents the interface between man, technology, and an ethereal ‘Other’ as a possible way for humankind to progress into a new era of peace and understanding.¹⁴

Rick Dunn creates an imaginative world in which the “viewer’s disbelief is at once supported by the photo-realism of the image, yet called into question by the impossibility of the scene.”¹⁵ This is the same technique I use in *Friends, Family and Fiction*. In an image where I hide frightened behind a protective woman (actress Angelina Jolie) wielding a gun, the picture looks convincing yet the celebrity and the situation portrayed would not be associated with myself (*fig. 17*). Dunn

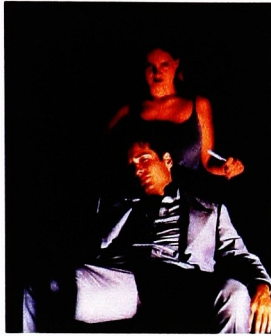


Figure 18 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

uses traditional surrealist elements to create his wonderful images. Combining reality with fantasy he fuses uncommon elements in his work. *Nose Job* (*fig. 15*) is a wonderful example of Dunn's unique perspective on life with its exaggeration and highly saturated palette.

The digital manipulation of images is popping up just about everywhere. Authenticity was previously taken for granted. More viewers now question the validity of images they see in advertising and even in photojournalism. Suspicion and/or cynicism now replace the trust previously implicit in the images. This creates tension between viewer and image that was previously not existent. This tension is reflected between the actor David Duchovny and myself (*fig. 18*). If not by the fact that I am wielding a straight razor, then by the mood set in the image. Whatever “story” is placed with that image, it is obvious that both characters are strong individuals. They challenge each other by their poses, enticing the viewer to ask: what is next? This is not unlike how images challenge today’s audience. Upon examining this phenomenon of trust, I wondered if I could push the issue within my artwork. Now that people look closely at the covers of fashion magazines to



Figure 19 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

see if the models have been retouched, would they question my photographs or inspect them in the same manner?

At the opening to my show I stood away from the kiosks, watching and listening to the passersby. A group of younger male students stopped for a long time in front of an image with musician Tori Amos (*fig. 19*) and myself arm in arm and smiling warmly out at them. Some students were in awe of the image and one said, “Wow, she really knows Tori Amos? That’s cool!” They then looked around at the rest of the images and eventually saw the food table over by the wall. They walked over to where I was standing and looked quizzically at me as I smiled at them. Then one of them said, “That’s you, right?” I replied, “Yes.” After a few minutes he said, “How did you do that?”

METHODOLOGY



meth o dol o gy

(meth"u dol' u jE)

-n.

a body of methods, procedures, working concepts, rules,
and postulates employed by a science, art, or discipline

Webster's Third New International Dictionary¹⁶

Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

Shakespeare¹⁷

Friends, Family, and Fiction was a completely new way of working for me. As stated it had to be a reaction to my frustration and depression of being away from my friends and family. My previous work had conventional words to go along with it like "still life" and "portraiture". I was working in traditional materials with classical structures. Now, with *Friends, Family, and Fiction*, I began presenting collages utilizing digital media. This dramatic change felt right, but confusing. Explaining myself to the public at large seemed to be an impossible task. When I spoke to others about my work I used "escapism" because it seemed to be the only word to describe it. When I found out that Escapism actually existed as a field of study I was overjoyed (see Appendix A). I felt a sense of connection I hadn't experienced for years. I finally

¹⁶Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged. (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company 1966), 1423

¹⁷Kittredge, George The Complete Works of Shakespeare. (Chicago: Spencer Press, Inc. 1958), 1162



Figure 20 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*



Figure 21 from *Friends, Family, and Fiction*

understood why and how *Friends, Family, and Fiction* came about and I was ready to talk about it.

I wanted all the images to include some person or persona I was attracted to and they had to appear life-like. I also wanted myself included in each picture. I believed the end result should look like an actual view that I had created in my mind, not the manipulation it actually was. I frantically searched for existing images that I could manipulate into something completely new. I worked in the studio for hours simulating poses that would perfectly mesh with the old images. I painstakingly composed and recomposed the images again and again. It was something of an obsession. When I got the image just right I would stare blankly at my computer screen. I was completely engulfed by the metamorphosis of my mental image having transformed into an accurate visual representation. I placed actress Claire Danes with a group of angel statues and myself (*fig. 20*) sharing secrets by candlelight. Musician Trent Reznor became my personal “playmate” in a cage (*fig.21*). I would meticulously adjust the images, knowing that no one but I would notice the difference; yet the details were important. The time and effort was rewarded when I felt that the final image was just right.

Each image had to work for me as a cohesive whole. Although each image was a separate scenario for me to play out, it had to be a place where I felt safe. In *Friends*, *Family*, and *Fiction* I am safe, strong, and loved. These were feelings I felt that were missing in my real life. Whether I played the part of friend, confidant, lover, or comrade; I was in a position of power. The image of Angelina Jolie and myself (*fig. 17*) is the only one where I am in need of protection, and even here another woman protects me. This restates the role of a woman in power. I found that empowering myself in the pictures as a potent woman helped me escape from a world in which I felt powerless.

To evoke the escape response from my audience, I included some familiar persona for my viewers to relate to or connect with. I presented my images large and back lit so that the audience could stand and stare openly at them the same way I stared at my computer screen. I was happy to see that many did so. As I was showing my work at Rochester Institute of Technology, I chose to display widely known and popularly esteemed individuals familiar to this specific viewing group. I used television as well as film actors and actresses, and popular musicians of the day. The proposed relationships between the

celebrities and myself were suggestive but ambiguous in order to let the viewers create their own stories.

The placement and display of *Friends, Family, and Fiction* was very important for conveying my message to as many people as possible. I used large, freestanding, kiosks to house the show. The light boxes were displayed in the main lobby to get as much attention as possible. People “on the street” could view the show through the large plate glass windows in the front of the building. This was popular art created for the average citizen. It was not to be hidden away in a sterile gallery setting.

Graphic Design techniques from my undergraduate studies were employed to entice the viewer into my world. Not unlike the backlit ads at bus stops or in airports, my images offer a chance to dream. "The dream of escape, of triumph, of leaving others behind. The dream of escaping oneself. Place yourself in these shoes. Place yourself in this picture."¹⁸ As one looks at the photographs, the shiny surface places the viewer's reflection physically in the image. Well-known celebrities "endorse" my view. Their nearly life-sized faces gaze fondly out at the audience. Imperfections of reality are simply erased with meticulous adjustments. Elements such as deep blacks

¹⁸Even, Stuart. All Consuming Images. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1988), 106

contrasted with bright colors and whites were used to attract my viewers to the images. Elements of style, power, and happiness glimmer out to the viewer. I entice them not to buy a product, but to buy into my fictional world. Come here and take a rest for a while.

Friends, Family, and Fiction evolved from an introspective self-history to a fantasy world of escape. My working style went from obviously collaged images to highly realistic scenes. This evolution in style and content produced a group of work that I am truly proud of.

APPENDIX A

es cap ism

(i skA'piz um)

-n.

diversion of the mind to purely imaginative activity or entertainment to escape from reality or routine

Webster's Third New International Dictionary¹⁹

They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night.

Edgar Allen Poe²⁰

Friends, Family, and Fiction is heavily influenced by the ideology of escapism. When Yi-Fu Tuan's Escapism came into my hands for the first time I was a skeptic. How could a geographer's theory of society relate to my artwork? I started to read and quickly changed my mind. I was able to start looking at my art in a more global sense. It was no longer me against the world, but me as a member of society.

The isolation I was feeling while attending graduate school was an all-consuming phenomenon. My photographs evolved from my need for release from this isolation; therefore I came to embrace the philosophy of escapism. This process of relieving realistic everyday pressure through the use of

¹⁹Webster's Third New International Dictionary Unabridged. (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company 1966), 775

²⁰Poe, Edgar Allen. Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1966), 513

fantastic or surreal surroundings or devices gave me the strength and focus of vision to complete this project.

The images that make up *Friends, Family, and Fiction* represent a fantastic world of endless hope and possibility. These imaginative places lightened my burden of daily tasks and overcame my feelings of expatriation. As an artist, I was able to exist outside the boundaries of my current state to critique and assess my world. In this land I could refresh and clear my head of frustration by temporarily leaving behind the restraints of reality. Here I could live out a dream deemed too risky or dangerous for my real life.

The forces that push people toward escapism come from both extremes of the stress spectrum. Yi-Fu Tuan calls these "drivers." The driver influencing most people is that everyday life reminds them all too well of how tough things are. They often find their need to escape fueled by the pressures of work, family life, and monetary hardship. They delve into fantastic journeys where, at least temporarily, things don't look so bad. These mini-escapes help keep a balance, so life as we know it can continue.

For others the opposite situation is the driver. "Modern men and women, living in their artificial worlds high up on the

ladder of aspiration and pretension, seem to suffer”²¹ from a similar need to escape. It is an escape from boredom that they desire. It is an escape from the *lack* of stress. With the advancement and refinement of culture, a strange transformation is imposed upon the individual. Alone at the top of the social structure, one has little concern, if any, for the rigors of daily life. Milan Kundera describes this detachment as “the unbearable lightness of being.”²² In this condition “the absolute absence of a burden causes men to be lighter than air ... take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant.”²³ Without the struggle for survival, one may feel as if one is floating above existence. The need to regain one’s connection with the earth is strong. People often find themselves escaping from this phenomenon by participating in extreme sports or playing violent video games. Then they can achieve aretē. “Excellence itself, aretē as the Greeks... would have called it, has always been assigned to the public realm where one could excel, could distinguish oneself from all others.”²⁴

²¹Tuan, Yi-Fu. Escapism. (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 13

²²Kundera, Milan. The Unbearable Lightness of Being. (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 3

²³Kundera, Milan. The Unbearable Lightness of Being. (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 5

²⁴Arendt, Hannah, The Human Condition, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958) 48-49

Yi-Fu Tuan describes these two contrasting drivers to escapism as *connected* and *attentive* versus *disconnected* and

indifferent. Whether mired in stress or floating above it, every person of every walk of life has at least one thing they can turn to when they need a lift. Escape can provide a welcome relief when the trials of reality bog one down.

Even as I draw attention to disconnectedness and indifference, I show how both can be overcome- how people escape from both. It is difficult to speak of the one without the other, for disconnectedness implies connectedness, indifference implies attentiveness. Culture, as I have repeatedly noted, is the most common device for moving from one state to the other. But people are rarely aware of this important function of a cultural performance or product because their attention is directed to more pressing needs and purposes to which that performance or product answers.²⁵

My personal movement was toward connectedness. The burden of my mental and geographical isolation from what I knew to be “home” became fuel for my artwork while attending graduate school. The things I longed to reconnect with – friends, family, and environment – found their way into my work and eventually formed the core of the project itself. I visually gave rebirth to my favorite ancestors so they could guide and comfort me. Within my pictures I rekindled friendships that were extinguished years ago. My photographs began as collaged memories and ultimately became a safe haven, a place for me to hide.

²⁵Tuan, Yi-Fu. Escapism. (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 91

Escapism is a powerful force in everyday life. Though most are not aware of it, the relief one receives is necessary to keep on keeping on.

...the proper function of all art, and therefore of literature, is "cathartic," that it should purge the spirit of pent-up forces which cannot express themselves in actual life, that it should afford symbolic fulfillment to our starved needs. Through art these pent-up forces are said to obtain "release." Sometimes it is claimed that, by diverting attention from the sordid actuality, art constructs symbols of a deeper reality, more consonant with the spirit's real needs.²⁶

Even though my real life goes on, *Friends, Family, and Fiction* remains a refuge I can visit from time to time.

²⁶Stapledon, Olaf. An Olaf Stapledon Reader, "Escapism in Literature," Scrutiny, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press., 1997), 188

APPENDIX B

Artist's Statement from Thesis Show of *Friends,
Family, and Fiction*

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Fan

Derica Lea Smith proves that you can live many lifetimes not one at a time but simultaneously. Her worlds are not simply, as the intellectually lazy are wont to say, Cindy Shermanesque images of an over dramatized, pop cultural, fantasy stock photography collection. She creates something that did and did not exist before. The celebrities themselves become friends, families, loved ones who connect. They love, laugh, and embrace and fall gracefully into bed and have breakfast when its over. She inserts herself into these created situations with little fanfare. The stars share her stage. She built it.

-N. Johnson

Reality?

This is my fantasy world. Where is yours?

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